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BILL TO PROTECT FLORIDIANS FROM LIBEL TOURISM SIGNED INTO LAW

~Bill Shields Floridians from Libel Suits Filed by Terrorists, Other Foreigners~

TALLAHASSEE, FL - House Bill (HB) 949, a measure relating to grounds for non-recognition of foreign defamation judgments, was signed into law by Governor Charlie Crist.

HB 949 will help in the fight against a tactic known as "Libel Tourism" which results from defamation lawsuits filed against authors critical of individuals with known ties to terrorist organizations like al Qaeda and Hamas. The lawsuits have been finding their way into foreign courts. HB 949 will provide Florida courts with the ability not to recognize a foreign judgment, if that country's laws protecting free speech and the free press are not at least as protective as freedoms provided in the constitutions of Florida and United States. Thus far, no other country is as protective.

"This bill protects all Floridians' fundamental right to the freedom of speech and press without fear of reprisal from foreign courts," said Representative Charles Van Zant (R-Keystone Heights), the bill's sponsor. "Free speech is a right that Americans and Floridians hold sacred. This law will ensure that no Floridian will ever have to answer to terrorists as a result of their criticism of terrorism, its enablers or its funders."

House Majority Leader and the bill's co-sponsor, Adam Hasner (R-Boca Raton) added, "This bill protects Floridians from having their right to free speech suppressed by those with radical ideologies. Foreign courts that do not place the same value on our constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech will no longer be used to intimidate Florida citizens and to fund terrorists."

The passage and subsequent signing of HB 949 follows the case of New York-based academic, researcher and writer, Dr. Rachel Ehrenfeld. In May 2005, she was ordered to pay a total of over \$57,000 in damages plus costs after being sued in the high court in London by multi-millionaire Saudi Arabian businessman Sheikh Khalid bin Mahfouz and his two sons. They sued over Ehrenfeld's book, *Funding Terrorism*, which was only published in the United States.

(more)

“Libel Tourism is a pernicious and growing phenomenon whereby wealthy and corrupt terror financiers exploit plaintiff-friendly foreign libel laws and expansive Internet jurisdiction to silence American authors, producers and publishers,” stated Dr. Ehrenfeld, whose plight inspired the measure. “Ever since the attacks on America of September 11, 2001, foreign libel laws have become a potent weapon used by the forces of tyranny who seek to undermine our freedom. Florida’s Libel Tourism Protection law stopped this invasive silencing of free speech and restored the liberty of its residents,” concluded Dr. Ehrenfeld.

The measure will become effective on July 1, 2009.

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